

A protocol for the nutritional management of diabetes in the Caribbean

☒ Godfrey Xuereb

Over the last 10-15 years, various regional institutions in the Caribbean have developed protocols for the clinical management of diabetes. These have been used to improve the quality of care for people with the condition. However, the nutritional component of care was not adequately addressed in these recommendations and no standardized regional guidelines existed. Godfrey Xuereb reports on the development of a formal protocol for the nutritional management of diabetes and related conditions in the Caribbean region.



In the late 1990's the Caribbean Food and Nutrition Institute (CFNI) developed an informal training manual for primary health-care providers on the dietary management of diabetes. This was successfully adopted by many of the region's health-care providers. Indeed, widespread demand for the manual suggested the need for the development of a formal protocol. As a result, in collaboration with the Caribbean Program Coordination Office of the Pan

American Health Organization (PAHO) and the Ministry of Health in Jamaica, CFNI embarked on the development of a regional protocol for the nutritional management of diabetes, obesity and high blood pressure (hypertension).

Objectives: care and quality of life

The main goals of the protocol were to improve the standards of care for all people with diabetes in the Caribbean region, and thus to

enhance their quality of life. In order to do this, the protocol needed to provide the necessary tools for nutrition management, including assessment, planning, implementation, co-ordination and evaluation.

The specific objectives of the protocol were:

- to provide guidelines to health-care providers at primary care level for the nutritional management of obesity, diabetes and hypertension
- to facilitate the documentation of nutritional management, incorporating this into medical records
- to provide a framework for setting treatment goals for the nutritional management of these conditions in the primary care centres in the region
- to define the referral process.

One of the principal challenges in the management of lifestyle-related conditions such as diabetes, obesity and hypertension is the scarcity of people with training in nutrition and dietetics

in the region. To overcome this difficulty, the protocol was to be targeted at a wide range of health-care providers, not just nutritionists and dietitians.

The protocol is targeted at a wide range of health-care providers.

Partnerships

Using the International Diabetes Federation (IDF) guidelines for the development of clinical guidelines, the project first identified the stakeholder groups.¹ A development workshop was organized with the participation of representatives from CFNI, PAHO, Ministries of Health, the University of the West Indies, diabetes support groups, and health-care providers

– including dietitians, nutritionists, nurses and the regional body for nutrition-related health-care providers. At the end of this workshop, a draft outline of the protocol was produced and a specialist dietitian was contracted to develop the recommendations according to international and regional evidence-based practices.

At this stage in the process, a joint application for funding was made by CFNI and the Diabetes Association of the Caribbean to the World Diabetes Foundation (WDF). The aim of this was to secure funding for the completion of the protocol document (including translations) and support for the implementation of training. The proposal was successful. The funds were obtained to finalize the document

and initiate training in Guyana, Belize, Jamaica, St Vincent and the Grenadines.

A collaborative process

While the protocol was being drafted, CFNI undertook a regional survey among policy makers and health-care providers to determine the status of nutritional management in non-communicable diseases. This survey was carried out in five Caribbean countries and its findings informed the management team on the priority areas of the protocol.

The draft document was circulated to a wide range of stakeholders in the Caribbean. In order to get

The regional launch of the Protocol in Antigua, November 2004.



From left to right: Juanita James, Ministry of Health Antigua & Barbuda; Linda Siminerio, IDF; Gina Tambini, PAHO; Lauchland Lake, Ministry of Health Antigua & Barbuda; John Maginley, Minister of Health Antigua & Barbuda; Fitzroy Henry, Director CFNI.

feedback on content, layout, language and appropriateness, workshops were held with dietitians and nutritionists, members of the diabetes associations in the region, and primary care nurses and physicians.

The protocol was endorsed by the meeting of the Ministers of Health of the CARICOM countries.

Once these comments were received and the necessary amendments made, the final content of the protocol was agreed. This provides a framework for nutritional care to serve as a guide to standard care. The document contains:

- the goals and objectives of the protocol
- an overview of the targeted health conditions: obesity, diabetes and hypertension
- a description of the general nutrition management process
- recommendations for the nutritional management of the specified conditions
- indicators for referral.

The protocol was presented to a meeting of the Ministers of Health of the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) countries for their approval. The meeting included representatives from all of the countries for which the protocol was designed. The Ministers were asked to assist in the integration of the protocol into their national policies. The protocol and plan of implementation was endorsed by the meeting and

CFNI was given the mandate to implement the recommendations in countries in the region.

Once this mandate had been given, plans were drawn up by CFNI and the Diabetes Association of the Caribbean for the regional launch of the protocol. A four-day workshop in November 2004 in Antigua was the venue for the launch of the protocol and served to train a group of people on its use. The protocol was presented by the Minister of Health of Antigua in the presence of the representatives from PAHO, CFNI and IDF. At the end of the workshop, each of the 18 countries represented drafted a country implementation plan. These are to be followed by CNFI, PAHO and the Diabetes Association of the Caribbean and the implementation of the protocol supported and assessed in each country.

This protocol will improve the quality of life of people with diabetes in the Caribbean.

Future developments

In the near future, supported by funding from WDF, the protocol will be launched in Belize, Jamaica, St Vincent and Guyana. The document is being translated into Dutch and adapted for use in Suriname. CFNI is currently seeking partnerships with other agencies and governments to implement the protocol in the rest of the English-speaking Caribbean. It is anticipated that the protocol will be reviewed and updated periodically as new scientific information is made available.

This protocol will be another important tool for all those who are working to improve the quality of life of people living with diabetes in the Caribbean.

☒ Godfrey Xuereb

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The Protocol is available from: www.paho.org/cfni

The IDF Guide for Guidelines is available from: www.idf.org

Reference

- 1 International Diabetes Federation Clinical Guidelines Task Force. *Guide for Guidelines. A guide for clinical guideline development.* International Diabetes Federation, Brussels 2003.